

## Interview H0043: with Tsarong Rimshi, Dündül Namgyal [tib. tsha rong rim bzhi, bdud 'dul rnam rgyal],, (India, 1991) : Part No. 3 of 7

*Tsarong Rimshi, whose personal name was Dündül Namgyal, was a well-known Western educated Tibetan official from one of the richest and most important aristocratic families. He was the son of Tsarong Dzasa, the architect of the program of military and infrastructural modernization after the 13th Dalai Lama returned from exile in India in 1913. On this tape he discusses his trip to China in 1955 on a tour led by Lhalu. When they came back through the southern route and arrived at Ganzi in Sichuan, he heard from Thönpa Khenjung that there was a revolt and the Chinese had bombed Drugugön Monastery.*

Q

I want to ask you about your trip to China, why you had to go, how you traveled, where you went and what you had to do?

A

We left for China in 1955 during the 9th Tibetan month. At the time I was in charge of the electricity project. During the winter, I would go to India to acquire electrical parts and I returned to Lhasa in the summer. Taring Ashangla [referring to my "uncle" George-la] was also with us. It was about this time that I was notified that I would have to go to China as a member of a tour group from Lhasa. These tours were organized every year and included representatives from the various monasteries, government officials, people's representatives, Women's Association members and Youth League members. The purpose of the tour was supposedly educational, but the main reason must have been indoctrination. We left in the 9th month. I had heard that in the 7th month my name was included on the list of the tour group. The Kashag inquired as to what my plans were, to

## Library of Congress

### Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

which I replied that I would do whatever was asked of me, whether that was going to China or India. I think the Chinese approached me unofficially on this matter of going to China. Since our government said nothing further to me, the Chinese took it for granted that I was going.

We left around the 17th or 18th of the month, in 1955. Our Tibetan group was headed by Lhalu [Sawangchemmo](#). There were also one or two Chinese officials and one small vehicle -a jeep- in which Lhalu traveled. The rest of us were put in trucks on which we accommodated ourselves by spreading our beddings and tents and covering them with rugs. Some of the people sat crossed legged and others not (European style). We departed in the summer and took the Northern route via Nagchu, crossing the Thangu-la [tib. thang gu la] Pass going as far as Xining. There was not much road to speak of since it was all the northern plain [tib. byang thang] and there was no place to stay, so we set up our tents in the fields. Travelling was very slow and it took us almost thirteen days to reach Xining, even though it was not very far. The reason for this was the absence of proper roads and having to cross rivers where large gravel paths had been laid on the riverbed to enable the vehicles to cross. On either side of our vehicle was a roaring river so a slight tilt and we could have fallen. Once a jeep tried to cross and got stuck and had to be pulled out of the river by tying the vehicle to a truck with a rope. Once the jeep was pulled out it would not start so we had to empty one of the trucks and divide the contents and put the jeep on the empty truck. So like this we traveled to Xining. I cannot recall everything that took place on our way to Xining, but just before we got to Xining we came across an area inhabited by Mongolians. For meals they served us boiled meat steaming on plates with the local bread. This was the way they treated us for meals. Otherwise we had to have the food prepared by ourselves in our tents with portable kerosene stoves.

Q

Did you have servants with you?

A

Yes, I had one servant. And there were others I knew who also had servants. We all chipped in together with our servants in the preparation of our meals. The Thangu la Pass was considered the highest point in that area. Actually, the mountain itself was not that high, but because the plateau was high, it was high. There was no road and it rained heavily, creating very muddy conditions for the trucks to travel on, except in 4 wheel drive

## Library of Congress

### Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

which allowed our trucks to go only about 3 or 4 miles per hour. Before we crossed the Thangu la Pass we spent a night at the foot of the mountain. That evening first it rained and later that turned to hail. It was said that the weather was extremely severe around that area. The weather conditions would change within a very short time. That night it rained, later turning to hail and it was so bad that when a side of my tent got lifted up, the rain just swept into my tent where I was laying. We quickly got the side of the tent down but by then I was quite drenched and was unable to sleep well that night. The following morning - as usual- just after dawn we were woken by a whistle. We all got up and since we only had tea, we had that with bread. When we took down the tents to fold them they were all frozen. They were stiff and hard to fold, so we put them on the ground and stamped on them with our feet to flatten them. When we loaded the trucks with our tents, we found them rather cumbersome and found ourselves sitting high on the trucks with the bulky tents beneath us. After travelling this way for some time, because of the heat of the motor and also because of our body heat, we found ourselves gradually sinking into the truck as the frozen tents started to thaw under us.

Before reaching Xining, we came across a lot of salt. This salt was found in the lakes in the form of rocks and though we were unable to get close, we were told that there were salt rocks in the lake. From Xining to Chengdu, some were sent by trucks while some of us were put on a plane with metal seats. These planes were probably the old DC 3. They were very noisy.

Q

Was there a welcoming party at Chengdu?

A

Yes, there was. Every place that we came to had a welcoming committee--school children with flowers and with drums beating--quite elaborate. In the evening, there would be a banquet and a brief speech from our group and also from the welcoming committee. After dinner, sometimes we were entertained with movies and sometimes there would be dancing. We reached Beijing in this manner. In Beijing we had to prepare ourselves and had to stay there for sometime. We arrived there on the 7th or 8th of September. We rested for two or three days and then were taken around to see shows that were meant to be educational. These outings would be followed by banquets in the evenings. They would find various means to entertain us--such as seeing the Chinese opera called:

Library of Congress  
Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

"White Beard." Since most of us did not speak the language, many fell asleep during the shows. We all had to attend the first of October celebration [ch. [shi](#) yi], which the Chinese consider the most important occasion [holiday]. We were all dressed up for the occasion and taken to Tiananmen Square where there was a military parade in the presence of Mao. Khrushchev was said to be there, and there were also some Indian leaders such as Lashmi Pandit and other foreign dignitaries. There were quite a few Mongolians in their national dress and they could have quite easily be mistaken for Tibetans. We spent the whole day there watching the military parades.

Q

Where did you stay?

A

They had arranged for us to stay at an excellent hotel with attached bathrooms, clean sheets and a soft bed.

Q

Where did you stay at the parade?

A

We were seated on the right side under Tiananmen. I think other foreign dignitaries were also under the gate. After the parade was over, in the evening, we were shown a fireworks display. A couple of days after that, we left for Dongbei in Manchuria. It was near Harbin, next to the Russian border.

Q

What were they saying was the reason for taking you there--to show their factories?

A

Yes. If one were to include the smaller factories, we saw match and shoe factories and other smaller factories for making precision tools and meters. If one were to give an example of our tour it would be something like this. The moment we get to the factory we would be taken by bus and taken to a hall. We would be served Chinese tea and the head of the factory would give a talk about the factory. He would go on about how

## Library of Congress

### Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

in the past the factory was started with the help of foreigners and the factory did not do well because they were fooled and given old machinery. But since liberation, under the leadership of Chairman Mao and the help and vigorous support of the Soviet Union's technical engineering experts who wished nothing for themselves but to help all mankind, things have improved greatly. For example, last year's production was such and such and this year production, etc. will surpass that of last year. After hearing all of that we would be carted off in groups to see the factory. After the tour, those of us who were [rimshi](#) or higher ranks were called aside. I suppose the assumption was that these people were more knowledgeable and they would ask us if we had any comments and what we thought. Our leader would reiterate what the factory leader had already said. Saying otherwise would not do.

Q

What would he have to say?

A

He would say, "We have never seen anything like this. We are truly amazed. We are now aware of the past when things were not going well and can witness the great progress that has been achieved."

Q

What did you think? What was your feelings?

A

Well, we were taken to a cloth mill. There were many machines and some of the labels had been removed, but some still had their Manchester England labels. They had said that with the help of the Soviet Union they had built these machines, when in fact some of them had been built in England. At first it created doubts in my mind. Later, I discovered that they said recklessly whatever suited them. They had taken us to a power station, which they said was no good. All the equipment was from Germany. In the past they had assistance from Germany, the U.S. and England, along with many other countries.

Q

At that time, were they saying things about foreign countries?

Library of Congress  
Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

A

They had tremendous dislike of them. They were regarded as foreign imperialists. Any -ism that was not communism, they were against. They would say that foreign imperialists and capitalists have suppressed the people.

Q

Do they say this all the time?

A

Yes. They would say that under the leadership and good graces of Chairman Mao we have been and are now happy, and then would go on to tell you many positive things. All together we must have visited about 140 factories, which took us 7 months. From the time we left Lhasa and returned it took us 7 months. At first we went to Dongbei towards Manchuria. From there we went to Shanghai and then south to a bunch of places. We even visited a ceramics plant as well as several medicine factories of which we knew very little ... We were taken to Nanjing to see the best telescope-that the Germans had installed- but then again they said that it was no good as they had to repair it. After all of this we returned to Beijing. We were there for about a month. While in Beijing, we had to form groups and write individual commentaries about our experience that they would later compile into a book. I think they printed the book in Beijing. The suggestions and commentaries from the various groups would come out as a booklet by the 1955 tour group and would be distributed in Tibet. In the evenings sometimes we would visit museums and at other times we would take a break and go on picnics in the parks. At night there were always movies, operas or dances. After our stay in Beijing. we returned by train to Chengdu by the southern route.

Q

Why the Southern route?

A

The southern route is faster and also the motor road had been completed.

Q

## Library of Congress

### Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

Had they made the southern route before?

A

On our way to China, I don't think the road was quite complete. I think they had finished it by the time we were on our way back. Up to Chengdu we traveled by train. From there by automobile. From Chengdu we traveled quite a distance, but not too far, when we came to a mountain. It was huge and it took us a whole day to cross it. The locals called it Erlang Shan. I don't know what it means. Having gotten to the top, it was quite a long way down and then we were in [Dartsedo](#) where there were Tibetans. The houses looked Chinese as well as Tibetan. [Dartsedo](#) used to be a trading center for tea and [khata](#) (ceremonial scarves) for Tibetan traders. We stayed in [Dartsedo](#) and then Ganzi was on our way. One night we were staying at a place and Thönpa Khenjung was with us. I knew him and got along well with him. He said that he had heard disturbing news that there must be quite a bit of trouble. The Khambas were rebelling against the Chinese and fighting and that the latter had dropped bombs. The Chinese had also bombed Drugugön [tib. gru gu dgon] monastery and the situation was becoming dangerous in the area. He said that a monk had told him that unless we were very careful, the Chinese would bring much hardship in Lhasa and Tibet. Thönpa Khenjung was quite astounded and didn't know what to make of the news. The following day when we left, the Chinese informed us the roads were not good as there were a lot of bandits in the vicinity so we must take extra precautions and have guards accompany us.

In the lead car we had guards in the vehicle with mounted machine guns and following us were more guards. On the way, we came across bridges that had been burned by the Khambas. This sort of talk was prevalent throughout our journey when we got to Ganzi. Ganzi monastery was visible from a distance. Among our group there was a monk from that monastery who was a representative. He asked if he could visit some of his relatives who were in the monastery. His request was denied. He was very sad and cried and begged again saying that he had not seen them for many years and since we were so close by he wanted to go. But he was refused again. We were to leave the next day, but it was cancelled and we were put up in the military barracks. I heard that no one may leave the barracks at night, but some of the more daring people in our group managed to sneak into town at night. They had heard that the liberation process [reforms] had started and that the Chinese had started taking up all weapons and were nationalizing the land. The following morning we were ready to leave, but were delayed again since the bandits were

## Library of Congress

### Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

still present along the way. We waited for a long time in a big courtyard. I saw Lhalu and I told him these were dangerous times and as he did not hold any official position [Note: He had been forced to take leave from the Kashag in 1951] after making his report upon reaching Lhasa, he should leave for India or else he as well as myself would greatly suffer under the Chinese. For myself, I cannot leave my children and parents, but it would be best for Lhalu to leave. I said the same thing to Thönpa Khenjung, who was related to Lhalu, since he was a monk and single and it would be better to leave. I assume he must have regretted this later as the Chinese killed him.

Traveling through the southern route, we had to cross many mountains. In Chamdo we stayed an extra day. There was a Chamdo tour group that had traveled with us from China. Once they got to Chamdo, they stayed behind. Their leader came to see us off and he and Lhalu touched foreheads when saying goodbye. I still have a photo of that scene. The Southern route is just like Teesta with forests on either side of the road. We were rushing to get back since the opening ceremony of the Tibet Autonomous Region was to start on the 6th of April 1957 and we had to be back before then. We were pushed to go as fast as we could and we even traveled at night. Some members of the group got stuck on the way and were not able to reach our destination until midnight. The next day we left in the early hours of the morning. I think we reached Lhasa the day before the celebration of the Tibet Autonomous Region.

It was in Chengdu that Liu Buzhang, one of our Chinese tour leaders who was said to be the son of a pig-killer (butcher) and was a most ill mannered person who knew absolutely nothing, sent an interpreter to summon me to meet him. When I met him he said, "Your attitude was very bad during the tour and that he is only confiding in me because we were close. Your father was a friend of his and therefore, I am saying this out of concern and that if you continue with this attitude nothing good will come of it. [He said] That once I got back, I should be more conscientious or else nothing good will result if I continue with the same attitude." I did not say anything in reply. I did not even say yes, yes. I said absolutely nothing. I left him with a good-bye and a handshake. When we got back, a meeting was held at which Lhalu had to give a speech. There was also a "welcoming meeting" where the different associations in Lhasa welcomed the tour group. And a very elaborate speech was given detailing the tour saying how enlightening it had been and how much we had learnt from this experience and how much progress had been made by the Chinese government under the leadership of Chairman Mao and with the help of the

## Library of Congress Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

Soviet Union. The industrialization of China had been greatly expanded and that we were all very astonished at the progress that had been made.

Q

Do you have to make a detailed report?

A

You had to, because it would be very dangerous [not to]. Of course the compiled report from China would have further expanded on ours. This was then edited, corrected and then printed and distribute in the thousands throughout Tibet. With pictures. Everything is like that.

Q

What were your days in Beijing like, from morning until night?

A

We are called at 8.a.m. for tea - that was breakfast.

Q

Where did they serve the food?

A

In the dining hall. When we got up, there was no one to serve us tea. We had to quickly wash and dress in order to be on time for breakfast, which would take about half an hour. Then we spent about 10 to 15 minutes in our rooms after breakfast before the buses were ready to depart at 9 a.m. to take us to see various factories. We came back around 12 and lunch was served immediately. At 2 p.m. we were taken again and returned around 4.30 p.m. Dinner was served around 6 p.m. If there was time between our arrival and dinner, a meeting was held. After dinner, there would be a show which would end around 10 to 10:30 p.m. The same procedure was followed the next day.

Q

What did the others have to say? Did you discuss anything?

Library of Congress  
Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

A

There would be polite conversations and joking around because we feared someone might snitch on us. Most people were polite and no one dared to speak out. Lhalu was quite brave in that respect. While going on these tours of the factories he questioned some of the production figures, since he also took notes. At one time when the factory leader quoted certain figures for the year's production, Lhalu questioned him and said that you have said that this year's production exceeded last years, but in your book, production was greater last year. So he questioned the contradiction in a sarcastic manner. He did this on several occasions and at times he even argued and stood up to them.

Q

Did you encounter much hardship on the way?

A

You mean on our way back?

Q

Yes.

A

Since we were on the road, one got tired, specially the older people. However, as for myself, being young I didn't have much recollection of being tired. I am sure the older people must have found it difficult.

Q

Did you have any talks about the factories and how good they were?

A

Yes, we did have. There was a Tashilunpo Rimpoche called something like Ngagchen [tib. sngags chen] who was the leader of his group. He had spent a lot of years in China and Shanghai and spoke fluent Chinese. He said that all this talk means nothing. He may have confided in Lhalu since they were both heads of their respective groups. He would talk of the past and how much better it was than now. For example, Dongbei and

Library of Congress  
Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

Changchun both had huge roads, but now hardly any cars, except for an occasional car that would go by and he said that there was absolutely nothing. There were hardly any pedestrians. It was kind of strange and everyone looked like they were afraid and everyone dressed in the same bulky outfit. It was nothing like what you see now.

When we first got to China in Beijing they took us to a department store. At the time it was not cold, but suddenly in October the weather changed dramatically. We were asked to pick an overcoat, [hat](#) and shoes for the cold weather. This included our servants too. For spending money we were given about 200 in paper currency. That's the way they prepared us for the tours. This was what happened when we first got to Beijing.

Q

Didn't they give you anything else? What was the food like?

A

The food was good. But since we all ate together with chopsticks from the same plate and the noisy way they ate, it was not too appetizing.

Q

Weren't the Tibetans seated together?

A

We were seated at separate tables that seated 8 to a table. I was seated with Lhalu, the Chinese leader and his two interpreters and two junior Chinese officials and some Rimshi. All of us were at one table including Lhalu's wife and also my wife. I did not have much of an appetite. I would fill my bowl and didn't bother to eat from the dishes. Instead I would ask for some sugar, which I ate with the rice. I suppose it must have seemed strange.

Q

That Chinese said about your bad attitude - what did he see?

A

I guess he must have observed incidents. It must have not looked good to them. I would not be flabbergasted with anything they had to show me as I had seen so many pictures and also I had been to India and seen factories and could read. So I would not be

Library of Congress  
Tibetan Oral History Archive Project (Asian Division)

astonished. It was probably my nonchalant attitude that they found offensive. Others, since they were villagers who had not seen or heard anything, would be surprised at anything the Chinese showed them.

Q

Were there a lot of people who were astounded?

A

I am sure there must have been people who were astounded since they had never seen anything like it before.

Q

Were you with any of these people?

A

Nobody I knew expressed their surprise to me internally. There were some from [Yadong](#) who had been to India and seen quite a bit and heard. But some of course were quite surprised.